

CULTURAL RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND MEDIA COMMUNICATION

Prof. Ass. Dr. Rexhep Suma

Faculty of Islamic Studies, Pristina (Professor)

rexha74@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The mutual relationships between media, culture, religion, and society in general have never been as perceptible as they became after the emergence of television, especially after the fall of the Soviet system. The influences between media (both new and old) and the nature of social relations, the way in which society defines itself as an organic unit (Gemeinschaft or Corporation) or as a Society (Gesellschaft or Partnership), have never been so clear.

This contrast, according to Michel Terestchenko (Philosophie Politique, 1994), reflects the same relationship that exists between the vision of the ancient city or the "beautiful harmony" of the Greeks according to Hegel, and the individualistic vision of modern societies. Whether electronic or print media, in democratic societies, play the most crucial role in providing accurate and reliable information to society. At least that should be the role and importance of the existence of media as the fourth power, alongside the legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Behind every editorial and informational policy, there are powerful circles, clans, and oligarchs who have extraordinary influence in shaping and communicating information to the wider public of a country or even beyond.

Keywords

Culture, communication, diversity, harmony, intercultural dialogue.

Introduction

The content of a nation's culture cannot be understood outside the realm of faith or the religions it believes in, beyond the influences they exert on thinking, dressing, and behavior. One of the most distinguished sociologists in the field of sociology of religion, E. Durkheim, wrote: "Religion is not just a system of practices; it is also a system of ideas whose aim is to express the world." The impact of religion on our daily lives is also evident in an interesting study conducted in Albania, where it is explained that 34.53% of students (from both Muslim and Christian faiths) regularly attend religious institutions, while 40.04% of them attend only on religious holidays, and 16.12% rarely do, whereas only 9.31% never visit religious sites and institutions (mosques or churches), (Fuga & Dervishi, 2002).

On the other hand, one of the most eminent sociologists in the field of communication sciences, McLuhan, stated that through the vast network of media, especially television, the modern world has considerably shrunk. Information circulates rapidly as image, sound, and text across all four corners of the globe and for a very short period. Almost everyone has the same information, the same media stereotypes, not to mention the same reactions to life.

The dependence of modern humans on mass communication tools in democratic societies, as well as in others, has reached critical proportions. Often, individuals are unable to think and act without the suggestion of mass media: their existence depends on those elementary instructions, so any deliberate ambiguity or any suggestion to suspend the decision for a certain period of introspection and analysis would have catastrophic consequences. To depict the complete picture of the misery of modern humans, the potential "apocalyptic" effects of mass media, in addition to what was emphasized, must be added: mass media condition not only their psychological structure but also their physical behavior (Bardhi, 2006).

At the beginning of 2000, a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it seemed that the globalization of the economy and the digital revolution were heralding a new era. The multiplication of international exchanges was an indicator of the transition from a multi-national economy to a global economy. Under the influence of the "convergence" of networks, the media accompanied this globalization, initially participating in it themselves, and then accelerating the flow, especially through information and financial streams.

In April 2000, a financial wave erupted around Internet values, dragging down most of the TMT (Technology-Media-Telecommunications) values; promises were not kept, and new shoots were discovering the common laws of market economics and competition. Why did the warning of April 2000 not have the effect of an announcement? Because the simultaneous globalization of markets and media before September 11, 2001, had not yet cast any doubt on these future figures under whose care the 21st century had been born, a few years earlier than scheduled: the information society, the new economy, and the "end of history."

The lost illusions and shattered dreams of the preceding century still manage to conceal that the numerical revolution, according to many signs, is only in its nascent stages. Born into the era of the Internet, Google, Yahoo, and eBay have submitted themselves to the rigid laws of market economy. Battles over content and standards, stricter than ever, pave the way for new products or services, while the right to competition strives to assert itself regionally and globally. Torn between its own divisions and its yearning for unity, the increasingly elusive world, plagued by dictatorships and terrorism, no longer expects salvation from technology or economy alone, but solely from the wisdom of politicians who reconcile the demands of distinct cultures, regions, ethnicities, or religions with the principles of universal human rights, sacred and inviolable (Balle, 2011).

Throughout the history of humanity, dozens of civilizations and great cultures have been established, all of which had sacred texts at their foundation, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bible, and Quran. In general, these civilizations were educational constructs that taught human beings about responsibility or, in other words, were created by humans with responsible minds. Within these civilizations, there were various codes of responsibility, translated into plain language and expressed through a fundamental formula: humans are responsible to God, to nature, to humanity, to oneself... Religious ignorance, as Kant (1724-1805) asserted, is not only the most harmful but also the most disingenuous of all. Those who possess limited knowledge of religion and science and engage in arguments are also harmful and disingenuous. Millikan (1868-1953), Nobel laureate in physics, remarked on this matter, saying: "When people who

know little about religion argue with those who know little about science, some may think that the disagreement lies between faith and science, while in reality, there are two types of ignorance."

Science cannot take refuge in religion, nor can civilization revert to the classical family.

Within civilization, without departing from it, no forces are seen to oppose all these phenomena. Moreover, within the scale of values recognized by civilization, there is no argument to emphasize the evils caused by irresponsible science and other moral crises, such as the flood of materialism, pornography, alcohol, etc. This is the very sense of powerlessness and resignation felt in the stance of American criminologists before the emergence of the wave of crime. In fact, this is the impotence of science against vices, which not only have a social dimension but also a moral one.

Within civilization, without departing from it, no forces are seen to counteract all these phenomena. Moreover, within the scale of values acknowledged by civilization, there is no argument to emphasize the onslaught of materialism, pornography, alcohol, and the like. This is the same feeling of powerlessness and resignation felt in the stance of American criminologists before the onslaught of criminality. In reality, this is the impotence of science against vices, which, besides their social dimension, also possess a moral one. The denial of civilization is not possible from within itself but from outside, namely from culture. Religious-ethical education and the family represent narrow gateways. However, science cannot take refuge in religion, nor can civilization return to the classical family. From the perspective of civilization, the circle is closed (Izetbegović, 2009).

The Western concept of a delicate balance between the sacred and the secular is the result of a lengthy historical process, and is a product of power struggles and conflicting claims to authority. The wars of the Reformation are reflected not only in proto-national loyalties, but also in religious goals (Riis, 1998b). We should not underestimate the influence of pervasive power and domination in creating these boundaries. The early modern development of European national cultures was closely linked to people's religious identities. This relationship can be illustrated by the melding of Lutheran identity with that of the Swede, of Catholic identity with that of the Irish, and of Anglican identity with that of the English. Although in recent decades nation-states have eliminated the designation of "state" or "established church," many deeply ingrained assumptions of national religions remain within the framework of law, public policy (such as annual tax revenues), institutional frameworks (such as schools), and understandings of secular authority (McGuire, 2007). Independent and open media are particularly important in any democratic society. The importance of information and accessibility to a wide audience is a crucial prerequisite for the rights of freedom of expression and political participation (ECMI KOSOVO). The respect for religious rights is guaranteed by law, "If you are a member of a community in Kosovo, you have constitutional rights to express, maintain, and further develop your culture and traditions. You also have the right to administer your cultural developments" (Constitution, Article 59.1; Law on Communities, Article 5.1.).

Noam Chomsky constantly emphasizes a simple conclusion: there is no need for any conspiracy theory to analyze media deviations in Western countries. A handful of individuals and corporations who today own the majority of media outlets gained control of their companies by openly supporting political elites in the countries where their media operates. Years ago, when Chomsky was asked how corporate elites controlled the media, he replied: "This is like asking how corporate elites control General Motors. They don't need to control it. It's theirs" (The Albanian Media Institute, 2004).

Analytical cultural studies related to the role of media have now become the dominant paradigm in communication research. Scientific cultural studies highlight the importance of so-called "administrative research" that is usually used to determine the degree and effect of programs, but agree that the quantitative effects of research do not really answer the fundamental question about religious media. Cultural studies focus on how individuals in groups use media to construct religious worldviews in their lives, and secondly, how these religious worldviews are interconnected with many different aspects of life.

Until the 1970s, the entire religious concept of programs and writings was intertwined with the impact of the audience, resulting in an impression of what could be done for Sunday services and engaging as many people as possible to

convert. However, gradually, studies moved away from the "effects" of these questions, focusing instead on how willing the audience is to form opinions based on the media, etc.

On the other hand, antagonism towards Islam has always been deeply ingrained in Europe since the time of the Crusades. However, this was at a distant border due to geographic distance. But based on today's reality, with a large number of immigrants as well as many Europeans and even Americans embracing Islam, unfortunately, there are voices that steer society towards confrontation with Muslims.

Regrettably, Western media have played a highly destructive role in promoting religious understanding and peaceful coexistence, contributing to the planting of animosities by portraying stereotypes of Muslims as fundamentalists and even terrorists. For example, after January 26, 1995, when the explosion occurred at the World Trade Center, the media, in general, depicted American Muslims as the cause of the catastrophe. Thus, whether knowingly or unknowingly, it was a profound mistake, and the media took on the role of judge, blaming and declaring all American Muslims guilty.

There are many common perspectives that bind all religions, despite their different worldviews, as they are connected by similar moral premises and spiritual horizons (Horizonti). However, when it comes to media relations, we often encounter the word "fundamentalist," which is mistakenly used as a synonym for "extremist." In reality, Islam strictly prohibits extremism. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Those who go to extremes (in the practice of religion) are cursed (by God)." Islam instills the belief in Muslims that they should have faith in all the messengers without any distinction, starting from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, although Jesus is mentioned more in the Quran than Muhammad (peace be upon him). This fact is overlooked by the media, whose responsibility is to present and publish the truth about these arguments rather than solely focusing on the black propaganda against a specific faith, in this case, Islam. Therefore, there is no connection between the portrayal of Islam as a religion and the reality presented in the media, and such presentations in public opinion only reinforce myths and falsehoods being spread about this faith. The dissemination of such information only fuels and increases hatred among different religions and peoples.

Preservation of identities

"Inter-cultural dialogue contributes to the understanding that despite our differences, we share positive values and confront similar challenges. Before the end of the UN Decade for the Dialogue among Civilizations and the Decade for the Culture of Peace, in a time when the process of globalization still divides us, it is essential that we prevent religion and culture from becoming forces that lead to conflicts and divisions." "From there arises the great power of religious and other community leaders to positively influence mutual understanding and coexistence, as well as contribute to the education of young people in this direction, especially in multicultural and multiconfessional regions such as Southeast Europe," says Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO (Yllpress, 2010).

Since economic, technological, and financial resources are not evenly distributed around the world, some ethnic, cultural, and national groups face greater difficulties in preserving their identities and traditions. Therefore, to understand the issues surrounding cultural imperialism, it is important to analyze the influence of American popular culture. There are no easy ways to assess the impact of popular culture, but we must be sensitive to its influence on intercultural communication.

Many cultural groups around the world are concerned about the influence of cultural imperialism. The Quebec government, for example, is concerned about the effects of English-language media on the Franco-Canadian language and culture. The French have also expressed concerns about the dominance of American popular culture and its influence on French society. The images produced by cultural industries such as film and television allow us to "travel" to many places around the world. Popular culture also helps us learn about other cultural groups. However, we should be cautious about relying too heavily on media images of cultural groups with which we have little or no personal experience, as stereotyping can be a problem. A significant portion of popular culture is produced in the USA and circulates globally. The lack of balance in the exchange between American popular culture and other cultural texts has raised concerns about cultural imperialism (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Our national identity certainly influences how we perceive the world and communicate with people of other nationalities. As one of our students emphasized: "The more I broaden my cultural horizons, the more amazed I am at how I see life as a result of being American. There are so many things we take for granted, like the only way to do something or think, as well as everything related to individualism and the associated values. There are so many types of people and personalities I had never imagined before" (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

It should be emphasized that we only need a small step towards comprehensive understanding that life in a world with diverse cultures and religions can only strengthen our relationships, encompassing a multitude of beliefs, ideas, and thoughts, while respecting each other's culture and faith.

Violence is any image that severely harms the spectator and temporarily disconnects them from reality.

Analyzing the circumstances surrounding the inspiration of Islam in Albanian lands, it has not been given the deserved place in the media space of all genres. However, it should be clear that this has not been a sign of forgetfulness, but a secular model (against Islam) that has been practiced only against the Islamic faith, which has a wide vertical and horizontal reach in our ethnic lands. Some media outlets have portrayed Islam as a religion of backward culture and civilization, as foreign to Albanians, as a religion of violence and fanaticism that hinders the modernization of life, freedom of thought, and expression; an Afro-Asian religion and some have even referred to it as an Eastern religion.

During the opening of the Second World Conference on Interfaith and Intercivilizational Dialogue, held in Ohrid, Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, among other things, said, "The individual is sacred. It is a spiritual being created equally, when we focus on others and love our neighbors as ourselves, we can live in peace, understanding, and tolerance with each other. Despite the differences in our religions and civilizations, when we focus on the justifiable needs of our neighbors, when we love ourselves and love our God, we can learn to live together" (Shqipmedia, 2010).

On December 3, 1977, the British newspaper "The Independent" published an article by Robert Fisk, which deals with the treatment of Muslim issues in Western media, where he explains that the West constantly and intentionally offends the Islamic faith in every way, through the press and other means. In this article, he mentions two examples of this, one of which is well-known and current: after the explosion of the Twin Towers in New York, the magazine "Time" starts its front page with the title "Islamic Terrorism"! On the other hand, Fisk continues, when the Serbs committed various genocides and crimes against the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was presented in the French media as a national conflict, not a religious one. And never have Serbian crimes been considered as European Christian terror.

On the contrary, that conflict has been portrayed in most Western media as a conflict over land dominance or due to geographic borders.

Sometimes the media also becomes a tool of violence. The publication of the 12 cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by the Danish newspaper "Jyllands-Posten" on September 30, 2005, has sparked and provoked millions of opinions in the Islamic world and beyond. Perhaps the goal of the newspaper itself was to increase readership to attract more advertising and publicity. "The fact that the amazement of the Muslim Eastern world has taken the form of tragicomedy, as in the case of Koliqi's flag merchant, is also evidenced by the news that the sale of Danish flags has increased in Egypt, which Muslims buy to burn. A paradox to lament" (Ibrahimi, 2006).

Do you know who Ernesto Sabato addresses? He addresses all those who advocate for a free world where everyone must necessarily build a new strategy with Islam, and this strategy will not be a strategy of war between civilizations and cultures, but a strategy of cooperation, understanding, and acceptance, integrating civilizations, cultures, and religions. Ernesto Sabato refers to a place Helder Lin: "..... Governments worldwide have forgotten that their purpose is to promote the common good. Solidarity plays a decisive role in this headless world, excluding different types..... Millions of beings heroically survive in misery. They are the martyrs..... In this existential and metaphysical poverty, everyone is a victim of a sky and a roof..... Banalities, where noblest feelings decay, degenerate humans into a pathetic caricature that no longer finds itself in being human..... Wretched is the person who relies solely on

reason – we save ourselves, sometimes, and above all, thanks to women, not just because they give life but because they protect this enigmatic species....."

However, both culture and media from another aspect have imposed on themselves, turning into a highly profitable field. Based on a study published in January 2009 by the Internet Broadcasting Union (IBU), advertisers in France invested nearly 2 million euros in the web in 2008. This estimate, conducted by Cap Gemini Consulting at the request of IBU, takes into account sponsored links (not included in the advertising market study published by IREP), which represent the main segment of the online advertising market or 800 million euros in 2008. The bulk of this gift comes from Google, which, on the contrary, does not provide statistics. Thus, according to this estimate, internet revenues account for 59% of television advertising revenues and about 6% of total advertising expenses. Internet advertising investments were expected to decrease by 14% in 2009, according to IBU (Balle, 2011).

Often, the media not only fail to play the role of cultural interconnection but also display violent images or convey messages that hurt the sentiments of believers, especially the Islamic faith, which the media label with various stigmatizations. Violence cannot be measured; it is qualitative. Violence is relative, it depends on each person, on the understanding they give it, on the meaning they perceive, but also on the society from which it is inseparable, which considers it an evil that can be overcome through justice and by embracing "civilization," or as a necessary evil for the birth of "superhumanity" or for complete happiness. According to Serge Tisseron, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, "any image that deeply hurts the spectator and temporarily detaches them from reality" can be considered violent. Moreover, today, images are even more dangerous because "they target our desires" by using and abusing their seductive power. However, we must remember that the issue of violence is linked to the issue of morality, with forbidden things and obligations, and that only learning norms allows us to distinguish between what the psychoanalyst Daniel Sobony called "the violence of life," which involves interacting with others, and "the violence of death," whose sole aim is to harm others without reason, while boasting about it (Balle, 2011). Increasingly, interreligious and intercultural conflicts worldwide have led to the promotion of inter-religious dialogue and intercultural understanding. The causes or reasons for these conflicts can be multifaceted. The world was divided into two poles in the past, northern and southern, where the northern pole experienced rapid economic development compared to the southern pole, which was plagued by stagnation, illiteracy, and poverty.

In earlier times, Robert Eco writes, every communication was addressed to a well-defined recipient whose interpretive codes coincided with those of the sender. Every negative meaning was characterized as a "decoding of the message," which rarely excluded the culturally accepted rules by all. However, in mass society, where the audience is inherently diverse and differentiated, decoding the message becomes the norm. Hence, the need arises for a semiotic study that controls communication flows and equips itself with the necessary tools of analysis to understand the procedures of decoding the message (and, if desired, to avoid its manifestation in the future). This presupposes, compared to any sociological investigation or aesthetic assessment, the analysis of the communication structures that TV brings to life, i.e., the pre-established codes of the sender, the form the message has taken, and the codes used by the receiver (Marrone, 2008).

Among religiosity and intercultural dialogue

The issue of dialogue remains the only way to achieve and support understanding between conflicting groups. Dialogue can take place among three types of groups: 1) political groups, 2) religious groups, and 3) supporters of political and religious groups. Of course, there are also differences in the level of dialogue and the inclusive process that the dialogue involves at each level. It can be established at the level of political or religious leaders, or at the level of intellectuals from various groups, as well as the general public. The nature of dialogue varies depending on the levels. For example, at the intellectual level, it requires more analysis, more detail about events, and understanding the nature of the force involved in supporting the conflict. At this level of dialogue, the strategy of promoting interreligious harmony and intercultural understanding must also be addressed. On the political level, dialogue can be conducted with those politicians who believe in secular policies and reject any ideology, religious politics, or cultural confrontation. In the political realm, dialogue can address the strategy of forming secular alliances to isolate social and fundamentalist forces. On the religious level, dialogue should address religion and theological aspects. Furthermore, religion must be understood at different levels, such as rituals, beliefs, institutions, and values. Although

rituals, beliefs, and institutions vary from one religion to another, values must be complementary. For example, Islam, among other things, is characterized by justice and equality among people. Rituals, beliefs, and institutions are unique in each religion, which often leads to misunderstandings. Every religious tradition emphasizes the importance of specific rituals, and belief remains central to the religious tradition, often demonstrating the superiority of rituals and belief in general. For example, Islam strictly prohibits prostration and worship of idols for purposes other than God. Hinduism, on the other hand, is different, as they believe in and allow prostration and prayer in front of idols. These religious concepts in some countries, such as India, have led to violent and bloody conflicts. However, this violence is not supported or encouraged by religious leaders, unlike political leaders who are genuinely concerned about rituals and beliefs. This does not mean that religious leaders do not change. These changes for proper dialogue need to be understood and appreciated rather than fought against. Many Sufis and Bhakti saints precisely do this. They not only attempted to evaluate these conceptual changes but also sought to reconcile them.

The effect of religious revival on human rights and universal social justice has been significant. Religious institutions have made numerous declarations regarding human rights and social justice (Temimi & Esposito, 2010).

Asgar Ali Engineer, in his article "On religious and intercultural dialogue," highlights some rules that he believes are of great help in achieving successful dialogue between religions. The following rules would greatly assist interfaith dialogue:

- 1) The parties involved in the dialogue should be deeply rooted in their traditions and have internal belief and conviction. This genuine belief serves as a strong foundation for dialogue.
- 2) Polemics should never be developed in dialogue because the polemical style is the antithesis of dialogue. Polemics lead the dialogue in the wrong direction and hinder the understanding between parties.
- 3) Dialogue should not only aim to understand the other but also respect their integrity. Any dialogue that lacks respect for the integrity and beliefs of the other party is prone to failure.
- 4) The idea of dialogue should be aimed at explaining viewpoints, rather than imposing a viewpoint. Otherwise, a small attempt to impose another viewpoint would harm and destroy the spirit of dialogue and lead to dissatisfaction between the dialogue parties.
- 5) The parties in dialogue should also consider diversity as an essential basis of life. Without diversity, life becomes monotonous and loses its beauty. Moreover, the Quran not only recognizes but also legitimates diversity. It is Allah's desire for humanity to have diversity. "To you, your religion, and to me, mine." (Quran, 109:6) "We have appointed a law and a practice for every one of you. Had Allah willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you." (Quran, 5:48) The absence of diversity and the imposition of an ideological system can ultimately lead to fascism and authoritarianism.
- 6) One thing needs to be well understood, the distinction between dialogue and monologue to have an effective dialogue. The desire to dominate the dialogue leads to a monologue. Each party in the dialogue should have equal space to present their viewpoints. Dialogue can only have true meaning when it is conducted in a truly democratic spirit, respecting and acknowledging the rights of all participants in the dialogue.
- 7) Finally, we need to understand that the achievement of an effective dialogue is possible not only when we listen to the other's perspective but also when we understand and appreciate it accurately within the given context.

If these rules find practical application in interfaith and intercultural dialogue, then the result will be highly encouraging. No country today can pride itself on the exclusivity of being rigorously adherent to one belief or one culture. Rapid economic development and communication have created diversity among different religious and cultural groups worldwide, where they have similar or shared opinions. Some groups may be a majority in numbers, while others are minorities. Alternatively, it is also possible for some minorities to unite and become the majority, as may happen in Canada in the near future. The mosaic of societal models can maintain its beauty only in harmony. The eruption of conflict can lead to the fading of this mosaic due to increased dissatisfaction and strained interethnic relationships (Engineer, Andromeda.rutgers).

The Muslim world can create a new civilization if intellectual, economic, and political elites can redefine the richness of Islamic civilization's historical legacy for the realization of effective activism in the social, economic, and political arenas. The new political agenda of the Muslim world, as a counter-response to the hypocritical New World Order, must be supported by intellectual productivity, economic efficiency, and social dynamism. Such a civilization revival will not only provide a solution for the Muslim world but also offer an alternative for all of humanity (Davutoglu, 2005).

In conclusion, dialogue consists of fostering coexistence, harmony, tolerance, and mutual respect among different cultures and religions. Together, they can overcome any problem, challenge, or adversity. This is the real dialogue of life, a dialogue that represents shared existence, where mass communication tools focus on respecting and nurturing love, respect, and the advancement of civil rights for the people of a country.

Conclusion

- 1) Religion, culture, and media should not become forces that lead to conflicts and divisions.
- 2) Inter-cultural dialogue contributes to the understanding that despite our differences, we share positive values and face similar challenges.
- 3) Media strengthens the influence of religion and culture, creating an inseparable connection between peoples.
- 4) Playing an overly active and effective role to prevent the world from being divided into "the West and the rest," as Samuel Huntington portrayed in his book "The Clash of Civilizations."
- 5) Media can influence the improvement of people's lives and contribute to peace and security. They can elevate morals and spirituality among people and bring satisfaction to individuals.

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